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RATING SCALES, SELF-ANALYSIS, AND THE IMPROVEMENT OF TEACHING

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Much has been said recently concerning the value of scales for rating teachers' efficiency. Studies have been made of the characteristics of good teaching and of the causes of failures. Scores of rating scales have been derived and more or less widely used. Constructive conferences have been held to improve the results of classroom instruction. Supervisors and progressive teachers agree that the use of rating scales has stimulated genuine interest in the improvement of instruction.

A generation ago Elliott, Boyce, Ruediger, Kratz, Littler, Moses, and others were carrying on very interesting investigations concerning the essential characteristics of an effective teacher. The productive effort which they stimulated resulted in the organization of a score or more of rating scales which have been used very widely. During the last five years, however, the interest in rating scales has decreased materially as judged by the number of articles which have been written. The explanation for this fact is that rating scales have been more or less indefinite and unreliable. Furthermore, they have been used primarily to rate teachers rather than to improve instruction.

In the May, 1920, issue of the *Elementary School Journal* Dr. Rugg presented a rating scale which marks a distinct step forward. It contains sixty-seven important questions relating to five essential phases of a teacher's work, namely, skill in teaching, skill in the mechanics of managing a class, team-work qualities, qualities of growth and keeping up-to-date, and personal and social qualities. Although the scale can be used by supervisors to distinct advantage, its most important use as described by Dr. Rugg is "self-improvement of teachers through self-rating."

It is interesting to note that this use of rating scales has usually been objected to on the ground that self-analysis by a teacher leads to self-consciousness and inefficiency. The position is definitely taken in this discussion that analysis is very essential to effective progress in the improvement of teaching. A supervisory or teaching device which records only a gross fact, such as "efficiency" or "inefficiency" on a teacher's part, is interesting but not very significant. The device becomes genuinely valuable when careful analysis reveals the causes of "efficiency" or "inefficiency" and suggests remedial measures. One of the best illustrations of the importance of analysis is found in the history of educational tests and measurements during the last ten years.

In the earlier studies which were made large numbers of pupils were tested, more frequently than not, for purposes of comparison. These results showed the standing of a school or a school system in comparison with the average accomplishment of other schools previously tested. Gross results of this type created genuine interest and enthusiasm at first. Gradually, however, a new demand developed on every hand. Teachers not only wanted to know that their pupils were strong or weak in their work but, in addition, wanted to know the causes of these conditions. In order to supply the necessary information and to provide for growth on the part of pupils it was necessary to analyze the results of the tests, to make detailed studies of the needs of pupils, and to outline a program of remedial measures.

The important point on which attention should be centered in this discussion is the very large significance of analysis as an aid in improving instruction. A test or a scale reveals indications of good or of poor work. A detailed analysis supplies explanations and suggests appropriate remedial measures. Very frequently facts of the greatest importance are brought to the attention of teachers through detailed studies which otherwise would have remained unnoted.

The application of the foregoing discussion to the use of rating scales is doubtless clear. Careful, deliberate analyses of the characteristics of good teaching are essential in any program calculated to improve instruction. Too frequently in the past rating scales

have been used to indicate the fact that a teacher's work was satisfactory or unsatisfactory. It is time that we appropriated the lessons which we have learned through the use of classroom tests. We should begin at once to analyze the causes of effective and ineffective teaching and to supply remedial measures wherever necessary.

The analysis by a teacher of her own strong and weak points is one of a series of closely related steps which must receive deliberate consideration by supervisors. In this connection the following problems are very important: selection of the essential qualities of a good teacher through the co-operative effort of the teachers who are to use the rating scale; printing of the list of qualities in the most effective form; deliberate analytical study by teachers and supervisors of the problems which are revealed; and a supervisory program which enables teachers to secure help when it is needed.

The first step in introducing a rating scale in a high school for the purpose of improving instruction is to secure the co-operation of the teachers in selecting the qualities which should be included. Three plans have been followed in this connection in different schools. In many schools a committee is appointed by the faculty to canvass the problem carefully, to prepare a tentative list of qualities or questions, and to submit a report to the faculty for consideration. In other schools the faculty as a whole devotes a number of its meetings to a discussion of the characteristics of good teaching. From time to time a committee is asked to summarize whatever has been accomplished and to submit the report to the faculty at its next meeting. This plan has the advantage that every teacher participates more or less directly in the discussions and is therefore intelligent in regard to the meaning of all the terms used on the rating card.

A third method is described by a superintendent as follows:

In order to provide a basis for passing judgment on the quality of the work done by teachers, we use a rating blank which is an adaptation of one used in Schenectady, New York. Although we incorporated the essential features of the Schenectady plan, we have adapted it to our local needs. In the beginning a committee working with myself on the general problem of

rating teachers decided that this plan with a limited number of modifications would be adequate. A copy was then placed in the hands of every teacher in the system. At teachers' meetings in each building the blank was discussed and suggestions were offered by the teachers. The result was that the blank was approved by teachers as a fair method of arriving at some judgment concerning their work.

It is very important that the co-operation of teachers be secured from the outset. Such a plan enlists the confidence of teachers and insures intelligent participation on their part. If a rating scale, such as Dr. Rugg has organized, is approved by a group of teachers, it can be adopted to advantage. Doubtless this rating scale is much more comprehensive and accurate than a scale which is organized by a more or less inexperienced group of teachers. If a rating scale which has already been organized is adopted, it is very important that each item be discussed thoroughly so that its meaning may be clearly understood.

If the list of qualities is prepared through co-operative effort the form in which the material is printed should receive careful consideration. In the first place, the statements should be worded in the form of questions. For illustration, it is very much more suggestive for a teacher to encounter the question "Do I distribute my questions effectively?" than to encounter the topic "Distribution of questions." The question challenges much more thought than the topic. In the second place, provision should be made on the rating card for a record of the teacher's judgment concerning her efficiency in each characteristic which is listed. This is frequently done by providing a space in which to write A, B, C, D, or E, or 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5. A still more effective device provides a series of columns on the right-hand side of the sheet. Very good work is indicated by placing a check in one of the right-hand columns; poor work, by a similar check in one of the left-hand columns. When a check has been made for each characteristic listed on the card and oblique lines have been drawn connecting these checks, one can tell at a glance the strong and weak characteristics of a given teacher. The following form has been recommended by Boyce:

	V.P.	Poor	Medium			Good	Ex.
1. General appearance.....							
2. Health.....							
3. Voice.....							
4. Intellectual capacity.....							
5. Initiative and self-reliance.....							
6. Adaptability and resourcefulness.....							
7. Accuracy.....							
8. Industry.....							
9. Enthusiasm and optimism.....							
10. Integrity and sincerity.....							

When a rating card is first introduced, teachers should receive a large amount of help from the principal. It has been found advisable for the principal and the teacher to make out separate records for comparison. Differences will be discovered in the ratings. These may be due in part to the fact that the teacher has never passed judgment before on the quality of her own work. More frequently than not these differences are due to variations in the standards which the teacher and the principal have in mind. A comparison of the two records may therefore suggest a number of questions which can be discussed to distinct advantage. The teacher's standards may be too high or too low, or she may have failed in the past to recognize certain strong or weak characteristics in her own work. If conferences based on records of a teacher's work are sympathetic and constructive, they may be genuinely helpful.

If the list of qualities is long, it is advisable to request teachers to limit their analysis to a particular section of the outline. Assume for the moment that the problem of questioning is under consideration. This problem may be made the basis of discussion in the teachers' meeting for the week. References to discussions of questioning may be assigned. Observation lessons may be organized to be visited by teachers who are interested in the problem of questioning. Stenographic lesson reports may be prepared and distributed to teachers for the purpose of illustrating good and poor questions. In other words, it is possible for a principal to organize all the supervisory activities calculated to improve the

quality of classroom instruction about the topics on the rating card. If the work is planned well in advance, one intensive study after another may follow successively throughout the year. During the course of a few months most of the important problems of instruction will be studied, and each teacher will have an opportunity to analyze her own characteristics more or less thoroughly.

It frequently happens that the questions on the rating card are not sufficiently detailed to enable the teacher to discover the exact reason for poor work along particular lines. For illustration, a teacher who asks herself the question, "Are my assignments effective?" may recognize at once that they are not, but may be unable to locate the exact character of her difficulty. In such a case the principal may give valuable assistance by aiding her in a careful study of her problems. It frequently happens, however, that the principal is unable on account of other duties to give help when it is most needed. It is necessary, therefore, to provide devices which can be used effectively by teachers without assistance from the principal. The plan which has been adopted by a number of progressive supervisors is to organize a set of questions which supplement those on the score card. These are placed in the teacher's hands to aid him in analyzing a problem in detail when difficulties arise. A list of such questions, based on the assignment of lessons, and prepared by a committee of teachers in a city system, follows:

1. In the assignment of the lesson am I definite and clear? How frequently do I find that pupils have misunderstood the assignment? Why? Do I make pupils responsible for knowing the assignments?

2. In making the assignment am I sufficiently careful to show the relation of the new lesson to the subject-matter that has been under discussion? Do I prepare the children to attack the new lesson intelligently?

3. Do I make sure that pupils have clearly in mind the points which are fundamental and of primary importance? Do they know the real results to be accomplished in the preparation of the lesson?

4. Is there a minimum assignment? What success does the slow child have with it?

5. Is there a maximum assignment? Does it provide properly and sufficiently for the ability of the brilliant child?

6. What plan have I for stimulating pupils of unusual ability to do additional work? For encouraging slow pupils to accomplish their best possible results?

The following questions relate to the attitude of the teacher to the pupil:

1. What effort have I made to analyze my real attitude and feeling toward my pupils?

2. Is my interest in them genuine and deep, or is it superficial, or of short duration?

3. How much do I know of the home and other outside factors that contribute to making the child what he is?

4. What allowance do I make for poor work, defects in character, or disagreeable qualities in a child when he is handicapped by an unfavorable environment?

5. Have I studied my attitude toward children for the purpose of determining whether I judge the conduct and work of children by adult standards, failing to take into account the limitations of childhood or adolescence?

6. Can I honestly say to myself that in my attitude toward children I am sympathetic, generous, kindly, and just?

The group of teachers who prepared the foregoing lists of questions had previously organized a score card containing fifty or more separate items. A list of questions numbering from five to twenty was prepared for each item of the score card. More than twenty-five pages of mimeographed material of this type were prepared for distribution to the teachers. It is needless to say that these detailed lists of questions will aid any teacher in making a careful analysis of his own problems. A few teachers might think of all the questions which were relevant to a limited number of teaching problems. Few teachers, if any, would think of all the questions relevant to all phases of their work. Especially is it true that the teacher who is encountering difficulty in his teaching receives a large number of suggestions from lists of questions

prepared for his use. They enable him to secure a broader perspective of his problems and to analyze them in greater detail.

The use of rating cards will have relatively little value unless continuous growth on the part of teachers is secured. A principal may provide rating cards but secure little improvement of teaching; he may require self-rating by teachers and provide them with elaborate sets of questions and suggestions but note no improvement in teaching as a result. A supervisory plan is needed which will stimulate constructive effort on the part of teachers. One of the most effective devices in this connection was organized by Professor E. A. Turner at the Illinois State Normal University. Each teacher under his supervision was required to submit a detailed report at the beginning of each week based on the following points:

1. The major problem attempted last week
2. A description of the means employed in its solution
3. A statement concerning the progress which was made
4. A discussion of the obstacles which interfered with best results
5. A statement of the major problem for solution this week
6. A description of the means to be employed
7. A discussion of the obstacles which will probably be encountered

In order to aid the teacher in locating her major problem Professor Turner prepared a list of twenty or twenty-five questions covering the most important phases of teaching. Rating cards now supply excellent material in this connection. If teachers encountered difficulty in selecting a problem or if they chose inappropriate problems, they were given help. As one report after another was submitted they were read carefully and helpful suggestions returned to the teachers. Detailed conferences were frequently held with individual teachers; group conferences were held to discuss problems of common interest to a number of teachers. Bulletins of suggestions were issued to teachers from time to time. Suggestive articles, books, and bibliographies were sent to teachers whose reports indicated that they could profit from such helps. Demonstration lessons were organized to illustrate effective teach-

ing technique. Schedules of visits were organized, that teachers could observe the methods employed by other teachers in securing effective results.

Throughout this discussion rating cards and self-rating by teachers have been emphasized as significant devices in a program of supervision. Connected with such a plan are numerous advantages. It directs the teacher's attention to significant problems of teaching; it leads to a careful analysis of strong and weak points; it concentrates constructive effort for a period of time on a single problem of methodology; it requires careful analysis and resourcefulness, usually leading to rapid growth; it establishes a means of effective co-operation between principal and teacher; it secures for a principal a body of information concerning the needs of teachers which enables him to distribute his time and energy among them appropriate to their needs; and finally, it leads to a continuous critical study of problems of teaching so frequently omitted in otherwise progressive high schools.